SOME ASPECTS OF MITHILĀ IN THE AGE OF JYOTIRĪŚVARA

By

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The rule of Karṇāṭa dynasty (C. 1097-1325 A. D.) in Mithilā is significant in the history of mediaeval India. For Northern India that age, in general, was chaotic and people were ill-governed. There was no central power strong enough to hold all the diverse threads of a disruptive country, nor quick to command the allegiance of rising feudal lords. Indians did not yet have the feeling of a tie of nation-hood. Provinces tried to assert independance and they wished to be treated as separate entities. Naturally there was a clash of interests between these entities, and more the number of clashes, greater was the tendency of these entities to gain freedom from the central power. The people in general were miserable. The society was breaking under new pressures. To add to these troubles, there was a Mohammadan invasion in the eleventh-twelfth century.[1] As a result, chaos and anarchy followed, society and politics were greatly affected.

But in Mithilā due to a number of reasons there was comparatively a greater peace and a seemingly more durable appearance of the social order. In northern India, the Karṇāṭa dynasty of Mithilā was the only Hindu kingdom which was able to keep itself off somehow from the general aggression and persecution of Mohammadans. But under Firūz Shāh even this isolated equanimity of that Hindu kingdom was broken; the King of Mithilā, Harisiṁhadeva, had to retire into the interior Tarai area in Nepal as a result of an encroaching and aggressive Mohammadan army.[2]

In ancient and mediaeval India the writers have seldom revealed their identity. At times, their patrons have been mentioned. But while this shows the magnitude of their personages, it proved a serious lack of scientific enquiry into statement of facts.

In consequence, books of this sort do not tell us the correct dates of events or adequate description of the author or the exact period to which they belonged.

1. U. Thakur, History of Mithilā, Chapter 8.
2. Ibid, page 281-283.

Jyotirīśvara is not free from the defects mentioned above. In the *Dhūrta-samāgama* Jyotirīśvara confesses that Harisiṁhadeva was his patron, but in several other MSS. of the same book, we have Narasiṁhadeva in place of the former. Both of them were Karṇaṭā kings. But Harisiṁhadeva[3] was the last king of the dynasty. Narasiṁhadeva preceded him by three generations.[4] There is roughly a difference of a hundred years between their reign-periods. The German scholar Christian Lassen takes Jyotirīśvara to be a contemporary of Narasiṁha (1487-1508), a King of Vijayanagar, and the writer is said to have lived under his direct patronage.[5] But Lassen's views can not be supported by facts. This is therefore, a miscarried hypothesis.

The *MS.* of D*hūrta-Samāgama*, which Haraprasad Shastri procured from Nepal Darbar Library, makes an explicit reference to Harisiṁhadeva as his only patron. The king and the author are thus contemporaries. The period in which Jyotirīśvara flourished is a subject of discussions even between the first two (joint) editors of the *Varṇa-Ratnākara*. In the English introduction to the book, S. K. Chatterji maintains Jyotirīśvara to be a contemporary of Harisiṁhadeva. The reasons for this are the number of Persian words and the Nepal *MS.* itself.[6]

But Babua Misra would not agree with Dr. Chatterji. The Pañjī begins with Harisiṁhadeva. It remains unaccountable to all reasons that a man of the stature of Jyotirīśvara should have been left un-noticed. It, therefore, follows that he lived earlier than Harisiṁhadeva. Some *MSS.* give Narasiṁhadeva. It is probable that Narasiṁhadeva was his real benefactor.

Ramanath Jha comes with facts against this evidence. He claims to have found the name of the author in a Pañjī. The objection to the date, on the basis of pañjī thus, remains no longer a valid reason for making Jyotirīśvara a contemporary of Narasiṁhadeva. In other words Ramanath Jha supports the stand taken by S. K. Chatterji and Haraprasad Shastri. Now it is already proved that Jyotirīśvara was the contemporary of Harisiṁhadeva. This as it seems to me, is the most scientific and accurate view.

A good number of books was written in Jyotirīśvara's time in eastern India. But these do not throw much light on the social condition of the times. The books by Jyotirīśvara give us a fair view of things rega-

3. U. Thakur, History of Mithilā, page 279.
4. Ibid, pages 265-268.
5. Antholigia Sanskritica, 1838.
6. S. K. Chatterji, Introduction of V. R. p. 18.

rding social organisation of Mithilā, the various conventions, the society, economic condition etc.

In the age of Jyotirīśvara, *Varṇa* system prevailed. The society was divided into castes and sects. Some of these belonged to a higher class and तापस . तेलि . तिवर''''धाङ्गल . धाकल . घोआर . धुनियां . घलिकर . डोंव . दाढ़ि''''चमार . गोआर''''नागर प्रभृति मन्द जातीय[7] belonged to the lower strata of the society. But some of those who belonged to the higher castes stooped low and became notorious. Town was the ideal place for such corruption.

This lexicon uses terms relating to the behaviour of urban people. It also portrays a good picture of the rural society.

People in general were addicted to bad habits. Gambling was one of the bad habits of people in general. The place of gambling is called by the name of "चेएटसार'[8] and we are told that while playing the people begun to quarrel amongst themselves.

The condition of women differed little from the past. Some taking clue from Manu "यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः" think high of the women of the time. But various sources e. g. *Sūtragrantha*, *Purāṇa*, *Pañcātantra* and *Hitopadeśa* speak of the women as not so high and worthy enough for reverence.[9] Since the beginning of the agricultural society, women, with a few exceptions, have been depicted as an object of enjoyment by some male writers.[10]

The condition of women in general was demoralising, The Sūdras and the women were placed in the same category.[11] The society had no respect for them. They were treated as an object of luxury and sexual gratifications. Jyotirīśvara describes the two sides of female character in the *Varṇa-ratnākara*.[12] The lexicon gives a twofold view of the women. In the first place, they have been portrayed with the help of simile and metaphors in a rather poetic manner :—"पूर्णिमाक चाँद अमृत पूरल अइसन मुह,[13] पारिजातक पल्लव अइसन हाथ[14] and विकसित स्थल पद्म अइसन चरण" । This concept of women as the good and the beautiful is obviously, in

7. Also see U. Thakur, History of Mithilā, Chapter V.
8. Varna-Ratnākara, page 1.
9. R. S. Sharma—JBRS Vol. XXXVI, Pt. 3-4, 1950, pp. 183-191.
10. Varnan Ratnākara—JBRS Vol. XXXXVI, Pt. 1-2. p. 121.
11. J. B. R. S. XXXVII, Pt. I-II p. 121 ff.
12. U. Thakur, History of Mithila, p. 365.
13. Varna Ratnākara, pp. 5-7.
14. Ibid, pp. 26-27.

accordance with the rather strict observance of what men thought of them when they acted as they desired. The other awareness, of a real situation, of a woman in love or the prostitute, of change in love, for a woman is thus described; "श्मशान" स्त्रीक चरित्र अइसन दारुण[15] "अन्धकार" (Darkness) स्त्रीक चरित्र अइसन दुर्लक्ष्य.[16] क्रित्रिम लज्जा. कपट तारूण्य धनार्थें प्रेम . लोभार्थें विनय कारणे सौभाग्य . निर्मूक्त स्वामि सिन्दूर एवं शीलवन्ति . विलाशवन्ति. वलवन्ति हृदयहारिणी.[17] If a prostitute has been looked down upon, in a similar fashion the "कुट्टिनी" (the female go-between in love) has also been denounced.[18]

His Sanskrit drama *Pañca Sāyaka*[19] indicates special significance of an erotic social ethos. It deals with the secret processes of love, and the varied types of *bandhas*. One gets glimpses of the different types of *nāyikās* in it. The articles of toilet, which beautify a women, have also been mentioned, The erotic life of well-placed men and women has been portrayed well by Kaviśekhara Jyotirīśvara.

From the *Varṇa-Ratnākara* we also get a picture of the religious life of the people during the 14th century A. D. In Mithilā the religious practice of the people was an ordinary form of the mediaevel cultured Hinduism. In the *Varṇa-Ratnākara* we find a "देओहरिक वर्णना"[20] account of the temple in which the *nāyaka* goes to perform his worship. We have here an enumeration of the paraphernalia used in worship[21] (pūjā). The *varṇāśrama*, the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇas were widely respected. People in general were well-versed in the Vedas and allied subjects. The Brāhmaṇa priest was given a high position. He was considered as next to the minister in the court[22] of the king. Jyotirīśvara himself was a devotee of Shiva,[23] But from other available sources we learn that all branches of Hindu religion were widely respected and practised in Mithilā.

In one place Jyotirīśvara has also referred to the Buddha, the Buddhists and the Siddhācāryas.[24] But the description shows that there

15. Ibid. p. 54.
16. Ibid, p. 16.
17. Ibid, p. 27.
18, Ibid.
19. Pañca sāyaka.
20. Varna-Ratnākara, p. 8.
21. S. K. Chatterji, Introduction of Varna-Ratnākara, p. 27.
22, Varna-Ratnākara, p 8.
23. S. K. Chatterji, Introduction of Varna Ratnākara, p. 15.
24, Varna Ratnākara, p. 57.

was still a wordy warfare between the Brāhmaṇas and the Buddhists. It is true that Mithilā was the last Hindu kingdom to be affected by the Muslims. But the Brāhmaṇas of Mithilā treated the Buddhists as their greater rival than the Muslims. By the 13th century the world-famous centres of Buddhist learning, Nālandā and Vikramaśila had already been destroyed and thousands of Buddhists massacred by the Muslim invaders. Inspite of the fact that Buddhism was now on the retreat and almost in the decadent state, the Brāhmaṇa scholars of Mithilā even than were unable to reconcile themselves to the changed circumstances. They were still attacking the Buddhists with all their vigour and refutiug their theories with all their logic. This is evident from *Varṇa Ratṇākara* of Jyotiriśvara where Buddhist doctrine have been denounced as degraded and dangerous while the theories of Udayana have been aclaimed as happy. The situation changed only after some time when the Muslims were thoroughly intrenched in northern India, putting an end to the age-old centroversy between the two sections.[25]

The period during which Jyotiriśvara flourished was the golden age of Sanskrit studies in Mithilā. Barring the episode of the Muslim invasion, the normal life in the land of Mithila seems to have been a peaceful and happy one, when the scholars could carry on their literary activities without any hindrance. The 14th century was a very important one in the history of *smṛti* studies in Mithilā under the Karṇāṭa kings and the kings of the family of Kāmeśvara.[26]

In the *Varṇa-Ratnākara* the author does not tell us anything about the life of a common man as it obtained during this period. But from his *Dhūrta-samāgama* we have a rough idea about the common people. For instance, he has presented the picture of a rich farmer who possessed every thing that goes to make life happy.[27] It may be presumed on the basis of this solitary reference that life in general in Mithilā was happy and peaceful, though this does not seem to be applicable in the case of towns which are said to have abounded in beggars.[28] More over the description of the palace given by Jyotirśvara undoubtedly shows that exploitation of the common men by rich aristocrats was no less rampant.

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25. U. Thakur, Studies in Jainism and Buddhism in Mithilā, Chapter III.
26. S. K. Chatterji, Introduction—Varna Ratnākara, p. 20.
27. Dhūrta Samāgam, Act-I
28. Varna—Ratnākara, p. 2.